

- **\*READ Ephesians 4:11-16\*** If we were to look outside the Gospels and the book of Acts for a book or letter that could give us great insight into the church and how it can grow, it certainly would be this letter to the Ephesians. This letter, which is referred to by many as Paul's great essay on the church, is a fantastic read for the individual who is wanting to understand God's desire for His people who make up the churches that His Son came to earth and died for.
- In the verses we just read, the Apostle describes the makeup of the church for a very particular purpose. Paul tells us that the church has been designed with this type of leadership structure for the purpose of *"equipping...the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ."* (4:12) Very simply, we learn that it is within the fabric of the church that disciples are to grow, and that is exactly what we are focused on doing this year within this church.
- The leadership of this church has designated that our focus for this year will be on the idea of growing mightily and prevailing as a church and as disciples. We see this happening in the book of Acts, and we want for it to be happening right here around us. We know that God wants for us to grow. We know that a lack of growth will hurt us, and we know that true growth takes effort. Each of us on an individual level must recognize and buy into these truths. Yes, this church has made it its general focus to be on growth for this year, but we must recognize that just because this church has a whole has this focus doesn't mean that we as individuals will automatically see the growth without lifting a finger. In fact, this goal of growth in 2018 will only take place if we as individuals are ready to buy in and become dedicated to achieving the goal of growing mightily and prevailing. Each of us will have to ask ourselves individually, *"Do I Want To Grow?"*
- Do I want to grow in my knowledge of Jesus? Do I want to grow in my discipleship? Do I want to grow in my efforts to evangelize? Do I want for these things to be present and to grow in my life? I don't think any of us, at least out loud, would answer "no" to these questions. None of us would say *"no, I just don't want to grow."* We might not say it, but the way we carry ourselves might be screaming that this is actually the case. We might not admit that we don't want to grow or that we might not be willing to put in the effort to grow, but the way we live will make this obvious about us. This morning, I want to ask three more questions as a means of encouraging and motivating us all, as individual disciples, to make the commitment to growth. It is my hope and prayer that these three questions will move us to want and to give every effort to grow in 2018.

#### I. Do I want to experience the benefits of growth?

##### A. Benefit #1: I will not be useless nor unfruitful.

1. At the beginning of our assembly, **II Peter 1:1-11** was read for us, and I would like to revisit this text to consider two benefits that come from our being diligent to grow in our faiths.
2. The first benefit we see is in **v.8**. *"For if these qualities are yours and are increasing (growing), they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* If we will give every effort to grow, then Peter is assuring us that we will not find ourselves with feelings of worthlessness in the Kingdom. God will take those people who are giving great effort and He will use them to be fruitful in the efforts for the kingdom. They will become more knowledgeable. They will achieve great righteousness. They will shine their lights brighter day by day. We can have great confidence in such things being true.

## B. Benefit #2: I will never stumble.

1. Just a couple of verses later, we will find that not only will our efforts to growth benefit us in the respects that we will be useful and fruitful for the Lord, but Peter also says that these efforts will help us to not be people who will stumble in our faiths. *"Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble."* (II Peter 1:10)
2. Does that mean that it is impossible for us to stumble as in it just cannot happen? No, that isn't what Peter is saying. This isn't some once saved, always saved type of thing. Instead, Peter is getting at the idea that the person who is diligent in his or her faith will be the type of person who is always on alert and on guard against those things that might make us stumble.
3. So what type of person will be a person who won't stumble? Back in our first text of **Ephesians 4:11-16**, we will see that the type of person who will not stumble or be tossed about is that person who is growing and being built up to a mature man. (**Ephesians 4:12,13**) When this takes place, then Peter says that the benefit is that we will no longer be weak children who are made to stumble by all of the trickery and deception of evil people. The temptations of this world will not phase us as they might the immature Christian. This is because we are becoming stronger...we are becoming more like our Savior, which is the last benefit we see from making the choice to grow.

## C. Benefit #3: I will be made to be like Jesus.

1. When we give effort to grow, to be better equipped, and to be built up then we will be making progress towards growing *"up in all respects into Him who is the head, even Christ."* (**Ephesians 4:15**) What better benefit could be thought of? What could make our diligence more rewarding than to become like the one to whom we have dedicated our lives?
2. However, we must notice that this will only happen when we are willing to do our part in the process of growing. *"from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."* (**Ephesians 5:16**) Every individual part must be willing to do its part for the greatest good to be realized. If everyone is giving great effort then the greatest potential for growth will be present.
3. I don't know about you, but these benefits sound pretty awesome to me. It would be great to be fruitful for the Lord, firm in my faith, and being made more like Jesus day by day. This can be true for us if we desire to experience these things through committing ourselves to growth.

## II. Do I want to fulfill God's design for the church?

### A. Remember, God designed the church for the purpose of inspiring growth.

1. Go back to **vv.11,12**, God established the church to be led by apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors, and teachers. Each of these positions of leadership were established for the purpose of leading disciples to growth within their faiths. Each of these positions play(ed) different roles that would lead to the *"equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."*
2. It must be so obvious to us God's desire for growth among his people. If we recognize that such a thing is true. If we recognize that He designed for this institution for the purpose of spiritual growth, faith, and character then we must not fail to allow for God's design to do exactly what He designed for it to do. That means that leadership must create opportunities for the church to grow, and it must mean that the members take advantage of those opportunities that are presented. God's design is flawless, we must simply do things the way that God designed for them to be done.

- B. The leadership of this church has provided many opportunities for personal growth in 2018.
1. The whole reason we pick a yearly focus is because we want to make sure that we have goals that we can strive for each year. You've heard me say it time and time again, but when there is no goal then true success is hard to come by. This is why so much time, effort, and planning is put into picking and developing a congregational focus for each year.
  2. It is the reason we don't just pick a focus and nothing else, but it is why we develop lesson schedules, Bible classes, daily Bible readings, and the Christian Training Classes for this year. These things have been developed so that the disciples that make up this church will have ample opportunities to grow. It cannot be said that members of this church are deprived of tools and opportunities to grow. If I really want to come to know more about Jesus this year, if I really want to grow in my discipleship, and if I really want to grow in my efforts to share the Gospel then I will have so many opportunities to do so through the lessons, CTCs, Bible classes, and our daily Bible reading. The opportunities are there, we just have to take advantage. If we want to grow, we will use the opportunities given to us.

### III. Do I want to please my Lord?

- A. The parable of the talents is a great illustration to show us why it is important for us to make the decision to give every effort to grow.
1. Really it can all boil down to this question. Sure we should want to gain the benefits of growth. Sure we should want to fulfill God's design for the church, but we do all of this because we recognize that this is His will for us, and our willingness to seek growth will greatly please Him.
  2. This parable by Jesus in **Matthew 25:14-30** very well applies to this question because it shows the two options that are in front of us regarding whether or not we will seek growth in our lives. The man in the parable goes on a journey and he leaves three men in possession of different amount of talents. The man with five talents goes and uses his talents to double what he was given. The man with two talents did the same thing, but the man given one talent just sat upon his talent and did nothing with it. **(Matthew 25:14-18)**
  3. When the man returns from his journey, he is very pleased with the two servants who grew their amount of talents. *"Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."* **(Matthew 25:19-23)**  
These were the awesome words spoken by the master to the first two servants.
  4. Things were not so good for the other servant, however. Remember, he sat on his talent... actually he literally buried it and did nothing with it. When the master found this out, he was furious and he berated this servant calling him *"wicked, lazy slave."* His anger resulted in the master demanding that the others *"throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in the place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* **(Matthew 25:24-30)**
  5. These slaves had polar opposite responses to the talents given to them, and it led to them receiving polar opposite reactions from their master.

## B. Which type of servant will I be?

1. Which of these servants will I be? Will I be the servant who recognizes my level of faith and seeks to use the opportunities given to me to grow it? Will I seek to create my own opportunities to grow where I see the need? These first two servants saw what had been given to them, but they were determined to use what was given to them and make it even better. For their efforts they were rewarded mightily, and the exact same thing can and will be true for us if we take what has been given to us and we strive to make it even better. If that is our goal and we given everything to achieve that goal then we will hear those same sweet words that were spoken to the faithful servants.
2. However, if we lazy and don't see the importance of growth in our faiths then we will disappoint our Lord in the worst of ways and we will reap the consequences of our unwillingness to to please God through giving great effort to grow in the ways He desires. The choice is completely ours...which will we be?

I would hope that each of us will answer these questions the same way. I hope that each of us will answer these questions with a resounding "YES!", and if that is the case then we all simply need to get to growing! Our growth in our faiths comes with great benefits, its what God designed the church to do, and it pleases Him in the greatest of ways. May God bless us in 2018 with growth unlike anything we have ever experienced so that we can be stronger than we have ever been. Do I want to grow? I know I do, how about you?

**\*PRAYER\*** *Our great God...we are so thankful that you have given us the ability to grow, and we pray that each of us will have a mindset that desires to do so. We thank you for the blessings of seeing growth in our lives. We thank you for the benefits of growth. We thank you for the church that puts us in a position to grow. We thank you for the rewards that we know await us in the next life if we will dedicate our lives to you. Father, may all of our efforts this year be to your glory and may we see the blessings of growth in each of our lives. We love you Father, and we love our shepherds who give so much to lead us in the pursuit of growth in all that we do. Please bless us as we grow together as brothers and sisters this year. In Jesus's name we pray...amen.*